

## HEALTHY LIVING

# Casual smokers light up less, to fight stress

## 'Chippers'

BY VIKKI CONWELL

Cox News Service

Roderick Jennings shares an old, unhealthy habit with America's new president.

The Lithonia, Ga., resident and President Barack Obama have been casual smokers, or "chippers," the slang term used to describe people who smoke an average of up to five cigarettes a day. These lighter smokers take longer breaks between cigarettes, can go days without puffing and tend to smoke to relieve stress or in social settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 9 million Americans light up this way.

"It's a security blanket," said Jennings, a 26-year smoker who puffs through a pack about every two weeks, usually after cocktails. Twelve years ago, he quit cold turkey for five years but started back during a stressful job transition. (The term "chipper" refers to the practice of addicts "chipping" or "cutting" drugs to dilute them.)

If the president, who claims to have quit but fallen off the wagon at times, really wants to kick the habit for good, he should opt for a really good stress ball or a healthier outlet instead of the "socially acceptable vice," said Jennings, 46, who now enjoys video games as his preferred stress reliever.

Researchers have linked the increase of casual smokers to economic and societal pressures. Add in the poor economy and rising cost of cigarettes, averaging more than \$8 a pack in places such as New York, and more people are simply chipping away at cigarettes.

"People are cutting back but not cutting out," said Tom Glynn, director of cancer science and trends for the American Cancer Society. He noted an increase in the purchase of single cigarettes in developing countries and even in the United States, where the sale of "onesies" or "loosies" remains illegal.

For some, casual smoking has been a lifelong ritual, like a morning cup of coffee; while others, such as Jennings,



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are transitioning from daily smoking to quitting. Their stable yet infrequent use of cigarettes challenges many fundamental beliefs about nicotine addiction.

Jennings plans to quit soon. His habit lingers from psychological rather than physiological reasons, he says.

About 15 years ago, the notion that people could smoke infrequently was inconceivable, said Terry Pechacek, associate director of smoking and health studies at the CDC. Previous research suggested that smokers needed 15-20 cigarettes a day to fulfill their need for nicotine, but the growth

in occasional smokers suggests otherwise, he said.

"It used to be rare enough that we weren't paying much attention to it," Pechacek said, referring to a growing number of studies about this subgroup of smokers. "We're now paying much more attention to this."

Still, occasional smoking bears a higher health risk than many people might realize, experts warn.

"There's no safe level of inhaling cigarette smoke," Glynn said. "Even smoking less than 10 smokes a day doubles your chances of developing heart disease."■

## There are no safe ways to smoke

Less smoking is better than more, but it is still dangerous, the American Cancer Society warns. Here's why:

- Research shows that smoking as few as one to four cigarettes a day can lead to serious health outcomes, including an increased risk of heart disease and a greater chance of dying at a younger age.

- All cigarettes pose a health risk. Those who switch to low-nicotine cigarettes often end up smoking more cigarettes to get the same nicotine dose.

- "Light" cigarettes do not have a lower health risk and aren't a good alternative to quitting. Studies have not found a decreased lung-cancer risk among smokers of "light" or low-tar cigarettes.

- Hand-rolled cigarettes are not safer than commercial brands.

- "All natural" does not mean healthier. Cigarettes marketed as having no chemicals or additives and rolled with 100 percent cotton filters are not safer than other cigarettes.

- Herbal cigarettes do not contain tobacco but emit tar and carbon monoxide that are dangerous to your health.■

## Celebrity Chippers

President Barack Obama (right) is not the only well-known casual smoker. Among celebrities who are or have been "chippers":

- **Pope Benedict:** "Thou Shall Not Smoke" is not one of the commandments, but surely God has something to say about this.

- **Prince Harry:** The rambling royal adds smoking to his list of escapades.

- **Laura Bush:** Now that she's out of the spotlight, she can come out of the smoking closet.

- **Sharon Stone:** Perhaps a "basic instinct" has her lighting up occasionally.

- **Pierce Brosnan:** Being an advocate for cigars seems like such a "James Bond" kind of thing to do.

- **Mary-Kate Olsen:** No doubt she prefers ultra-slim cigarettes.

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President Barack Obama

- **Kate Winslet:** The down-to-earth actress reportedly maintains a down-low habit.

- **Renee Zellweger:** Her chain-smoking character Bridget Jones reportedly got Zellweger hooked. She claims to have quit.

- **Paris Hilton:** What's the world's most famous party girl supposed to do at parties?

- **Whoopi Goldberg:** She let a national audience "view" her campaign to quit a couple of years ago ... but, whoops!

- **Anna Kournikova:** The tennis glamour girl says four or five a day doesn't constitute a habit.

- **J.K. Rowling:** The "Harry Potter" author quit smoking but is now said to be addicted to Nicorette chews.

- **Tobey Maguire:** Perhaps dangling from a weblike strand can stress an actor playing a superhero.■



## Chipping Away

Are you a "chipper"? If so, here are some tips to help you quit for good:

- Make a list of reasons you want to quit. A strong commitment and desire to quit are vital for success.

- Document which days (over a two-week period) you smoke, how many cigarettes you smoke and what the circumstances are.

- Schedule an absolute quit date of two to four weeks in the future.

- Enlist support of family, friends and co-workers, especially those who are present when you smoke.

- Seek information and support from quit lines, Web sites and cessation programs.

- Talk to your physician or pharmacist about using a medication to help you quit. Many chippers use nicotine gum to allay withdrawal symptoms when they most want a cigarette.

- Avoid the situations where you are most likely to smoke, to break the habits associated with your occasional smoking.

— Tom Glynn, American Cancer Society